

James Robinson House
425 Salt Street
Saltsburg
Indiana County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5427

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32-SALT,
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JAMES ROBINSON HOUSE

HABS No. PA-5427

Location: 425 Salt St., Saltsburg, Conemaugh Township, Indiana County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: Jack and Evelyn Mash.

Present Use: Single-family residence.

Significance: This vernacular, frame, L-plan dwelling reflects a typical Pennsylvania form with early Federal details--such as the doorway--with later Victorian modifications; it was also the property of the Robinson family during the canal-heyday of the nineteenth century as the home and shop of cabinet-maker James Robinson.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Probably ca. 1828-35; pre-1855.
2. Original and subsequent owners: The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure stands, historically lot No. 49. Reference is to the Recorder of Deeds Office of the County of Indiana, Pennsylvania.

1832 Deed April 27, 1832, Volume 7, Page 787.
John Robinson
TO
James Robinson

1876 Will June 13, 1876.
James Robinson
TO
Jane and Margaret Robinson

1882 Deed September 4, 1882, Volume 44, Page 484.
James M. George and Jane C. Johnston
TO

Benjamain S. Kelly

1905 Deed October 19, 1905, Volume 90, Page 260.
B.S. and Jennie Kelly
TO
James Clark Moore

3. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings have been located, but the two-story, seven-bay frame building has been somewhat changed from its historic form.
 4. Alterations and additions: The large-paned picture windows on the right half of the Salt Street facade are probably not original, though perhaps they were shop windows. The spindlework on the front porch most likely dates from the late nineteenth-century. A secondary door immediately to left of the main door appears too oddly placed to have been part of the original (otherwise rather graceful) design of the building; perhaps this door was added later, as an entrance to the cabinetry-shop portion of the house.
- B. Historical Context: The dwelling at 425 Salt St. was the home and cabinetry shop of James B. Robinson throughout the middle decades of the nineteenth century, although prior to that the land was in his family. Robert Robinson (1739-1836), a mason, emigrated to Philadelphia from Ireland in 1770. The family included his three sons--John, James, and Robert--who with their families generally settled in Saltsburg. The 1855 Peelor map lists seven Robinson-owned properties; the 1871 Beers map lists eleven.

For additional context, twenty-one reports on other buildings in Saltsburg may be consulted, as well as overview histories of the town of Saltsburg (HABS No. PA-5438) and of canal town development in Pennsylvania (HABS No. PA-5666). See also, Sara Amy Leach, ed., Two Historic Pennsylvania Canal Towns: Alexandria and Saltsburg (Washington, DC: Historica American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, March 1989).

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The building at 425 Salt St. was built as a

traditional Pennsylvania dwelling: two-story, seven-bay, gable-end-and-wing plan with modest Federal highlights. Its integrity has been somewhat blemished by later alteration of the historic fabric.

2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: About 40' x 40' with a 20' ell (Sanborns).
2. Foundations: Stone covered with stucco; slightly banked.
3. Walls: Clapboard.
4. Structural system: Wood frame.
5. Porches: A one-story, raised, frame porch with hipped roof extends across the three northernmost bays of the east Salt Street facade; this later addition features Victorian post bracing and balustrade, a wood deck, lattice infill at the base and a modern iron handrail. The south facade features a shed-roofed entry in the second bay from the west; raised stone step and cantilevered roof bracing. An open, one-story porch on the interior north facade, features a shed roof and squared supports with modest bracing.
6. Chimneys: There are two brick interior chimneys; one on the east gable end of the ell, and a slope chimney along the back side of the ridge of the main block, opposite the ell.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The vernacular Palladian doorway on the west facade is the finest design characteristic of this building. The center bay is arranged with a single, glazed and paneled door surrounded by side-lights with recessed-panel bases and glazed upper halves; the elliptical fanlight above contains two lights. The surround framing is broad and molded, with notable bulls'-eye corners. A secondary door on the Salt Street facade is probably original, but is squeezed between the former doorway and a set of windows; it is a smaller width than the primary door, with a glazed upper half and wood panels, with plain, wood architrave trim.

The south facade features two door openings, one that is certainly original is contained in the second bay from the east; it is wood, paneled and topped by a three-light transom. A second door exists on this wall in the second bay from the west, although it appears to be largely a modern alteration. It is unknown how many doorways exist on the rear facade, though there are undoubtedly at least two.

- b. Windows: Fenestration across the second-floor of the west (five bays) and south (five bays) primary facades is regular, containing two-over-two-light double-hung wood sash with plain architrave trim.

The first floor, west facade, has a banked arrangement of three windows that are one-over-one-light, double-hung wood sash. The south end of this facade contains display-type windows that appear to have some historic elements, but their date is uncertain. The last bay is unusually wide and contains storefront glazing topped by a three-light transom; next to it is a narrower, single-light opening.

The south facade contains a similarly modified opening in the westernmost bay and the third bay from the west: display-window-like glazing is supported by a recessed wood base panel that appears to be historic to some degree. The easternmost bay contains a window like that found on the second floor.

A three-part bay was appended to north end of the east/rear facade between 1909 and 1927; it is in place today.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Side-gable with gable wing, covered with rolled asphalt standing-seam metal.
- b. Eaves: Slim and somewhat extended, supported by understated Victorian brackets spaced at about two per bay.

- C. Site: Located on a corner site northeast of downtown Saltsburg but one block from the canal/railroad right-of-way, the James Robinson House faces west. Historically on the fringe of town growth, it is situated across from the

Presbyterian Church on the south, and additional developed blocks of commercial and residential buildings on the west and north.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Old Views and maps:

The collection of the Saltsburg Branch, Historical and Genealogical Society of Indiana County, Stone House Museum, contains numerous historical images.

Beers, F.W. Atlas of Indiana County. New York: F.W. Beers and Co., 1871.

Johnson, George B., and Palmer, Ann. Saltsburg--The Way It Was--An Appreciation. Indiana, Pa.: A.G. Halldin Publishing Co., 1986.

Peelor, David, and Barker, W. "Map of Indiana County, Pennsylvania." North Hector, New York: 1856.

"Saltsburg, Pa." New York: Sanborn Map and Publishing Co. Ltd., February 1886; New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Co. Ltd., October 1891, January 1897, July 1903; New York: Sanborn Map Company, April 1909, February 1927.

B. Primary and unpublished sources:

Indiana County, Pennsylvania, deed books and tax records.

C. Secondary and published sources:

Arms, C.T., and White, E. 1745-1880, History of Indiana County, Pennsylvania. Newark, Ohio: J. A. Caldwell, 1880.

Berringer, Gloria, ed. Canal Days Sesquicentennial: 1838-1988. No publisher, 1988.

Biographical and Historical Cyclopedia of Indiana and Armstrong Counties. Philadelphia: John M. Gresham and Co., 1891; reprinted 1982.

Johnson, George. Saltsburg and the Pennsylvania Canal. Historic Saltsburg, 1984.

McCullough, Robert, and Leuba, Walter. The Pennsylvania Main Line Canal. York, Pa.: American Canal and Transportation Center, 1973.

National Register of Historic Places Inventory, "Western Division of the Pennsylvania Canal: Indiana and Westmoreland Counties." 1979/82.

Stewart, J.T. Indiana County, Pennsylvania: Her People, Past and Present. Chicago: F.W. Beers and Co., 1913.

Wallner, Peter A. "Politics and Public Works: A Study of the Pennsylvania Canal System, 1825-1857." Ph.D diss., Pennsylvania State University, June 1973.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was conducted by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record in cooperation with the America's Industrial Heritage Project under the directorship of Randy Cooley; AIHP is an undertaking of the National Park Service, based in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. Recorded under the direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, the project was completed during summer 1988 at the HABS field office in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Project leader was Alison K. Hoagland, senior HABS historian; field supervisor was Dorothy Burlingame, University of Vermont; project historian, Kristin Belz, University of Virginia. Large-format photography is by David Ames. Editing of the final report was done by Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.

This report was completed as part of a larger project documenting two canal towns--Saltsburg, on the Western Division of the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal, and Alexandria, on the Juniata Division--flanking the Allegheny Divide. Twenty-one reports on other buildings in Saltsburg, an overview history of Saltsburg (HABS No. PA-5438), and of canal town development in Pennsylvania (HABS No. PA-5666) are part of the HABS/HAER collection. Twenty-two reports on buildings in Alexandria (Huntingdon County) and an overview history of Alexandria (HABS No. PA-5407) are also available. Results of the project were published as Two Historic Pennsylvania Canal Towns: Alexandria and Saltsburg, Sara Amy Leach, editor (Washington, DC: Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, March 1989).